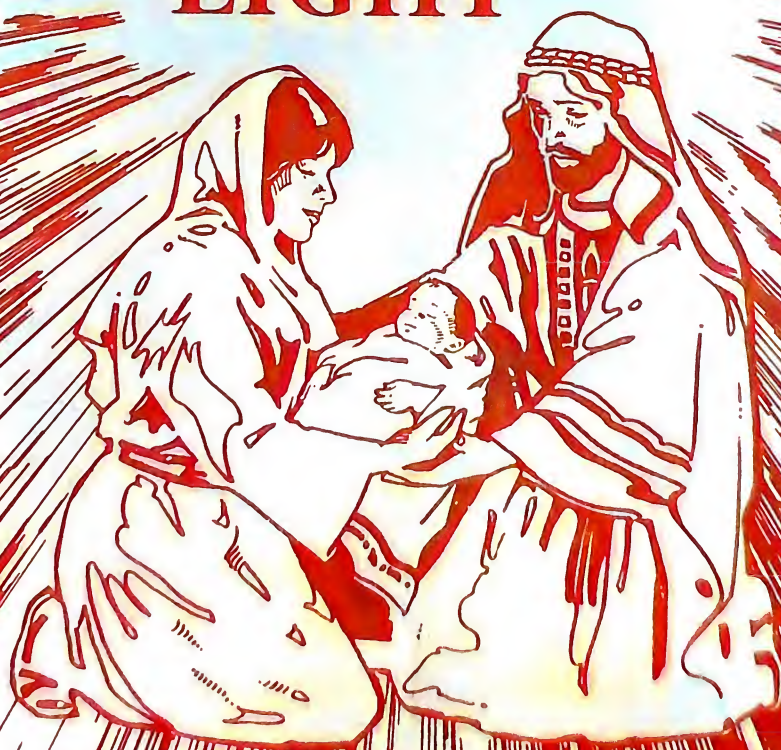


**WALK
IN THE
LIGHT**



OF CHRISTMAS

WALK IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

**A Word About
“Walk in the Light of Christmas”
by Edward Grube**

It is the joyful calling of every Christian to walk in the Light—God’s Light sent from above in the person of Christ Jesus. It is this Light which was first viewed in the stable because there was no room—even for God’s Light—in the comfortable, warm inn.

In this booklet we trace the steps toward the manger of God’s Light. We are open to His Light of examination, bringing our dark corners of sinfulness to recognition and dispelling them with the grace and forgiveness that is ours only through Him, the Savior born in Bethlehem, the Light of all mankind.

“Walk in the Light” is the theme for the International Lutheran Laymen’s League this year. It is an appropriate theme for all believers: “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). May this walk through Advent, Christmas, and the days up to and including Epiphany be a blessing to you as you walk with your Savior.

Gerald Perschbacher, manager
Print Communications, Int’l LLL

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2185 Hampton Ave., St. Louis, Mo. 63139

December 2

WALK IN THE LIGHT

"But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Have you joined the headlong rush towards Christmas? Mega malls and small stores alike throb with anticipation of increased sales. Elves, reindeer, Santas, snowmen and their families, sleighs, igloos, and wreaths decorate every shopping center. News headlines herald late breaking controversies over public displays of religious symbols. Labored grunts echo across the country as families struggle to extract artificial trees and ornaments from attics and garages.

Lights glow everywhere. Metropolitan skyscrapers proclaim "Seasons Greetings." Department stores wink, blink, and chase in merry colors, and the really elegant places celebrate with tiny but refined white lights. Rain gutters bear brightly colored strings of twinkling glory. Cars slow to view the lights and moods seem to brighten. It's called the Christmas spirit!

Fellowship—that's what much of Christmas is about. People feel closer, more loving, perhaps even more forgiving. But moods don't last long, and lights are destined for their usual 11-month hibernation. What survives when the lights are gone?

John tells us about genuine light: Christ's light. It never goes out. Rights groups are powerless to ban it. It can twinkle with joy, race in excitement, or beam with pure respectability. And it brings fellowship and peace to all who believe. Christian fellowship supplies year 'round Christmas spirit. We have it because God gave it to us. We can share it because the Holy Spirit maintains an infinite inventory free for the asking, free for the giving. This is what Christmas is about!

Walk in the light. Share the Christmas spirit. Share the Advent spirit. Christ will come again!

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, let every Christmas light remind us of You. String us together in fellowship and make us shine with purity and love. Amen.

December 3

LIGHT ENERGY

"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

What do you envision when you think of Jesus? Does He have a warm and knowing smile? Do His sorrowful eyes pierce you with guilt? Is His face drawn and pale with agony from the cross? Or does December remind you of a contented infant snoozing among the animals and cooing before astonished shepherds?

Jesus probably made many faces. His infancy was filled with baby faces—smiles and frowns, wide eyes and sleepy slits. Undoubtedly, His boyhood was filled with faces, too: delight, curiosity, concern, and ultimately the confidence that marked His confrontation with anxious parents when He stayed behind to teach the teachers. It's not difficult to imagine Jesus looking to heaven through bloodshot eyes as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane or His hurt look when Judas betrayed Him and Peter abandoned Him. Then there were the vacant eyes of death on the cross.

Today the face of Christ Jesus dazzles us with glorious light. We know Jesus as victor over death and the devil. His face is no longer that of a pink cheeked baby helplessly asleep in a dirty barn. His face shines with glory because He is God—Powerful Creator of earth and heaven, risen Redeemer, and Gift Giver of faith.

We read God's Word not by light streaming through windows or falling from nearby light bulbs, but by the light that is in our hearts. God gave us this holy light so that we can see beyond tender smiles, youthful grins, and anguished grimaces. We can know the glory of His story. How sad Christmas would be if Christ's story ended on Good Friday. How sad our story would be if it ended with our last breath. But God's glory surrounds us. Its energy will pop open our eyelids and shatter death's darkness with His glory.

Prayer: O Lord Jesus, prepare our hearts this Advent. Light them with Your glorious energy that we may be ready to meet You face to face. Amen.

FIRST LIGHT

"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day,' and the darkness He called 'night.' " (Gen. 1:3-5).

There were no tangled wires, stacked circuit boards, or switch throwing ceremonies. God merely uttered a simple command and light filled the universe. Just as a carpenter flips a switch to light his workshop filled with creative tools, God illuminated His workplace with glorious light before He lovingly fashioned a place for His people. He literally turned on the lights that we might observe His power at work for us. And this, indeed, was a glorious light for it wasn't until three days later that He created the sun and stars.

As we "watched" His work appear during the six creation days, we marveled at all He prepared for us. He made a blue sky and crystal waters and filled both with abundant varieties of life. He dotted the waters with dry land on which He grew luxuriant gardens. Animals of every kind wandered with the confidence and security that only God's peace could give. And then He gave it all to His last and best creation. Adam sprang to life with God's own breath.

Adam and Eve were our first ancestors. Among our inheritance from them is sin. They brought a new darkness into the world when they disobeyed God. People have sinned ever since. We, too, live with the knowledge Adam and Eve gained when they tasted the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We know evil's darkness. But thank God that we also know Christ's light.

Christ's light overcomes evil's eclipse. Its glare seemingly blinds God to our sins. For Christ's sake He counts us sinless. Now Jesus is preparing a new place for us. We'll see His glory as freshly as it dawned upon God's first creation of that paradise cultivated to give Him glory. The new paradise is for us.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for choosing us to live with You. Prepare our hearts this Advent to meet You at the dawn of our new lives in Your glory. Amen.

December 5

NIGHT LIGHTS

"The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid? Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord (Ps. 27:1, 14).

Darkness and fear are natural partners. Were you ever afraid of the dark? Did you ever get over it? Isn't it amazing how a little four-watt night light provides comfort by softly illuminating familiar surroundings?

David's darkness in Psalm 27 was even blacker than imaginary night time terrors. He spoke his hope of light at a time when even his own son was plotting against him. His fears were real, but he saw the light of his salvation in the Lord. Darkness and fear were changed to light and hope through David's trustworthy Savior.

Like David, we need not wait for light and salvation. God's comfort through Jesus Christ is available now. David believed God's promise of a Savior. For him, the promise was as good as the real thing. God's Word is guaranteed. For us, the promise of Christ's second coming is as good as the real thing, too.

Sin forces fear into our lives: fear of evil nations and nasty neighbors; fear of failure; fear of growing old; fear of not growing old. Our fears are real, too.

That's where our Savior comes in. He has chosen us and knows us by name. Nothing can separate Jesus from His people—neither distance nor armies nor disease nor death itself. Within the darkness of deepest despair, Jesus lights our way to Him. The light may be as gentle and inviting as Psalm 23. Or it may be as brilliant and powerful as Ex. 13:21. Darkness and fear are changed to light and hope through the Savior who promised to return for us.

Prayer: God of power and light, send the peace that overcomes all fear.
Let Jesus light our lives both now and in eternity, Amen.

December 6

STAR GAZING

"I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel" (Num. 24:17).

The daily horoscope is among the most popular sections of larger

newspapers. Whether whimsical or serious, many people like to consult the stars to anticipate their future.

Balaam's oracle recorded in Numbers is an early reference to Jesus as a guiding light for beleaguered sinners groping through darkly tempting and devilish deeds. It pointed people toward true light and set the stage for the Messiah's arrival. But the oracle is a doubled edged sword of God's Word, too. It threatens Satan himself because God's royal scepter of power defeats death and rules with justice.

Gaze at the sky tonight. Whether clear or cloudy, millions of stars punctuate the universe's darkness. God used stars to tell people how much He loved them. He told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, and that one of those stars would be Jesus Himself. The most powerful armies of the world couldn't quench God's light. And God placed a star in the sky which led the Wise Men to know their Savior, the King of kings. And even cruelly fierce Herod couldn't strike it from the sky.

Those stars told our future, too. Regardless of time, place, or manner born, Christ's people share a common destiny. We will possess treasures even more dependable than those we have now. You may not meet a tall, dark stranger who promises good times, but you will meet Jesus who first arrived as a lowly infant and will return with God's royal scepter.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let the stars remind us of Your love. Keep us from false hopes and empty promises. Let Your Word bring us news of our real future with Jesus. Amen.

December 7

HEADLIGHTS

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105).

Imagine a midnight drive down a moonless country road at 60 mph without headlights. Such carelessness and lawlessness would certainly end in disaster.

Imagine racing through a lifetime blind to God's Word, never knowing where the next curve may be—ignorant of obstacles—running a crash course with a sudden dead end.

Thank God for equipping Christians with headlights! God illuminates the curves, obstacles, and dead ends that threaten eternal destruction to those who wander. God's Word guides us through life, keeping us on the roadway leading to Him. At the end of the road is our heavenly home where Jesus will welcome us in from the darkness of sin and death.

God's headlights are powered by the Holy Spirit. They come in various shapes and forms. Daily devotions such as these keep us familiar with His love and guidance. Religious radio programs such as "**The Lutheran Hour**" reveal practical insight from the Bible. Regular participation in worship services keep us bright with the fellowship of other Christians who are heading in the same direction. Baptism and Holy Communion are "high beams" that help us see Jesus through vast distances of time.

And what does His light reveal? Nothing other than the saving love of Jesus Christ. Soon we will celebrate His birth. In less than half a year we'll ponder His death and rejoice over His resurrection. Prepare now for the Christmas Baby. Get ready for the Easter Savior. Wait for the return of the triumphant King.

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, keep the headlights of our faith bright and clear. Light our way through life and keep us on the path to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

December 8

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light" (Matt. 6:22).

Ancient Egyptians practiced an early form of optometry. They bent light rays with crude lenses in order to see better. We do the same thing today with eyeglasses and contact lenses. People donning their first pair of glasses often are amazed at how much brighter everything appears.

We need to look at life through corrective lenses. Those who think they possess perfect vision without spiritual glasses fool themselves. Spiritual eyesight is 20/20 only when corrected through Jesus Christ. How dim and dismal life would be without the Savior! We would clearly see overwhelming

trouble and misery. Sometimes our eyes would fool us with mirages of happiness which would vanish all too quickly into empty voids of despair. The whole meaning of life would be blurred. And we would be blind to the meaning of death.

Jesus gives vision. How distinctly those shepherds saw their Savior in the humble Baby of Bethlehem! The Wise Men opened their eyes on a whole new era when they visited the young Boy who would someday welcome them to heaven. Even wicked Herod spotted a clear threat to his satanic ally when he learned of the new King. Remember the blind man healed by Jesus? He saw more than streets and buildings and people. He saw his Savior and Lord—and he rejoiced.

Advent is a time for preparation. It's a time to scan the horizon for Christ's second coming. The Holy Spirit keeps our spiritual glasses clean so we can recognize our Savior's face and run into His arms when He returns for us.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Savior, give us clear sight of Your love that we may ever remain faithful. Send Your Spirit to correct our vision that we may always focus on You for all our needs. Amen.

December 9

SEEING THE LIGHT

"The unfolding of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:130).

The light bulb is a symbol of understanding. When someone perceives an explanation, he may exclaim, "I see the light!" Cartoon bubbles show a light bulb when characters have bright ideas. On the contrary, when someone is confused or ignorant, he may plead, "Don't keep me in the dark."

God's Word seems like nothing but a jumble of history, myth, and fantasy to those who haven't seen the light. Some of the most learned scholars and advanced thinkers possess less understanding than young children when it comes to God's Word.

Simple saving faith is a free gift of the Spirit. Faith feeds on God's Word and grows stronger and healthier as long as God's Word is the sole source of nourishment.

Can we ever know too much about God's Word? That's like asking if we

can ever receive too much love. God's Word is love. He tells us that He sent Jesus to live the life we couldn't and to die the death we wouldn't survive. It's a message that we look forward to each December as we await the warm glow of Christmas peace. As we study His Word, a simple faith offers new revelations of which we never before dreamed. As God fills us with knowledge of His love, our Spirit-inspired minds can create new ways of reflecting that love to others.

Anyone can fill his brain with stories and facts from the Bible. Only Christians know God's love through Jesus Christ. Simple faith made the Wise Men truly wise. Simple faith makes children secure about their salvation. Accept the gift of faith which God gives you. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall, indeed, be saved.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, make us wise about our salvation. Never allow intellectual skills to overshadow the pure simplicity of Your love for us. Make us believe with a child-like faith. Amen.

December 10

FREE FOR ALL

"Arise, shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Is. 60:1-3).

Was Isaiah talking about us? Israel longed for a powerful kingdom based in a land they called their own. They wanted fame. Isaiah told Israel that their greatest claim to fame was yet in the future. His prophecies gave clear reference to the Messiah—His birth, His mission, His death, His victory. Jesus would be so famous that people would remember Him for thousands of years. He would be Israel's greatest star, worshiped by people from many nations.

Isaiah was talking about us. The Christian church's greatest growth has come from people apart from Jesus' race. Many of the Lord's own nationality and ethnic background rejected Him and continue to reject Him today. Salvation is not wasted on those who refuse to accept their Savior. God knew that everyone needed Christ because all people are sinfully unworthy to live with God. So He made Jesus available to all who would accept the gift of salvation.

God wrapped His gift in swaddling clothes and placed Him in a manger. Have you wrapped any Christmas gifts yet? As you prepare for Christmas perhaps it's unthinkable that the receiver of your gifts would refuse to accept them. You give them in love with no strings attached—ribbons perhaps, but no strings. That's exactly how God gave us His most precious gift. We need not trace our family tree back to Abraham to receive His holy inheritance. We certainly can't earn His most precious gift. It's free. It's yours. You are among the nations who have seen His light.

Prayer: Thank You dear God for giving the Savior to all people. Thank You for choosing us to receive this Gift. Help us to gratefully show this Gift to everyone we meet. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

December 11

CHRISTIAN CANDLEPOWER

"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put in on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

God wants Christian candlepower to light the world. Few of us are embarrassed or timid about extending cheerful Christmas greetings at this time of year. The words "Merry Christmas" proclaim Christ and identify Christians. The same freedom and energy we have during the Christmas season can fuel us throughout the year as we await Christ's second coming.

Sin can shroud our light. Wearing a cross to church may be easier than wearing one to work. Prayer before meals may be shyly bypassed in crowded restaurants but freely offered at home. Reluctant worshipers can be coaxed to Christmas Eve services for their annual pilgrimage to church. Regular church goers can taint their worship with criticism of those less loyal to the congregation. Fortunately for us, even these sins are forgivable.

Christian candles vary in intensity. Sometimes it's easy to proclaim Christ. At other times it's more difficult. But each time we let our light shine, we give glory to God. Our daily witnessing and testimony leads others to Christ. Others will wonder why you are "different." You can tell them with words, "I

love Jesus because He first loved me.” You can light the world with your behavior and lifestyle. People will notice. Perhaps they too will praise the Father who sent Jesus to you.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, let our lights glow as brightly as a city on a hill during a clear winter night. Let others praise You because of what we do. Amen.

December 12

SINGING STARS

“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? . . . while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7).

Have you ever attended a choral concert where you couldn’t understand all the words? Melodies were clear and distinct, but the lyrical message was not completely understood.

Doubt and faith can exist side by side in Christians. God’s Word challenges human intellect and demands belief in unbelievable things. While we cling to our Savior Jesus, intellectual temptations may nag us. How could God create our universe with mere words? How did a landlubber like Noah build a ship large enough to survive a universal flood with its cramped cargo of animals? Did the waters really move aside on the Red Sea so Moses and his people could escape Egyptian slavery? How could the Savior be born to a virgin? How could Jesus come back to life after dying on the cross? Can we really expect Jesus to return? Why does God love us?

When God spoke the words of today’s Bible reading to Job, He indicated that human minds are incapable of perfectly understanding God’s ways. Job and his associates were asking God, “Why?” We may bitterly or sadly ask the same during times of tragedy or grief. We are inclined to rely on intellectual skills and abilities, but God’s wondrous works defy systematic explanation. At times like these, we need to listen to salvation’s melody.

God’s melody is easily heard. Our ears hear it, and our hearts find peace in the simple Gospel message that Jesus saved us. When we can’t understand God’s mysteries we need to listen to the familiar melody of His love. When

Christ returns, He will share His divine mysteries with us—and then we shall know Him perfectly.

Prayer: Lord God, help us to patiently await the answers to all our questions. We already know Your love through Jesus Christ. Keep us faithful to overcome all doubts and anxiety as we wait for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

December 13

BRAKE LIGHTS

“For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are a way to life” (Prov. 6:23).

Brake lights perform one essential service: They warn others to stop. The Lord's commands serve the same purpose.

The Children of Israel wanted to know how to please God. So the Lord issued 10 commandments that covered every possible relationship. The only catch to the commands was that they were impossible to obey. Some would-be perfectionists deluded themselves into thinking they did obey God's laws. God's law became an obstacle that separated people from God.

God's love was too abundant to let such an obstacle prevent people from being with Him. He sent His Son Jesus to crush the obstacle through perfect obedience on our behalf. Jesus was our substitute, and we need not attempt perfect obedience for self-righteousness. Then, why do we need God's commands when we live under His grace?

God's law serves us by telling us to stop. Have you noticed that His commandments show us how to live happy lives? They tell us what to avoid if we want a good relationship with Him. They guide us away from behavior that leads to broken relationships with others. His law tells us to stop before we crash.

Insurance companies confirm that rear-end collisions are common on city streets. People defy safety intervals. Wet pavement causes skidding. Attention spans drift. The same things happen to Christians. When we ignore God's brake lights, we suffer the consequences. But we also have

Jesus as insurance. He paid the bill on Good Friday, and He makes us new again. By God's grace, He never cancels our policy.

Prayer: Thank You, heavenly Father, for showing us how to live. Give us strength to follow Your plans for us. When we stray, bring us back to You through repentance, and make us confident of Your love through Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 14

LIGHT ARMOR

"The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:12).

Familiar fables never cast heroes in dark clothing. Heroes sparkle with purity and shine with goodness. Dark dress matches the dark deeds of villains. Modern tales, often animated through cartoons follow similar ancient patterns. Bad guys don't wear white. Their teeth never sparkle through a smile. Even altars in our churches are draped in black on the darkest Friday during the church year—the Friday we now call good.

Jesus Christ is our hero. He shines with the glory of God. He is the armor against all that would harm us. And He's light enough for us to wear wherever we go.

Natural impulses drive us toward villainy. Sin incites dark deeds and even darker consequences. Paul knew all about sin. He sometimes thought of himself as the greatest sinner because he persecuted Christians. But Paul also knew much about light. He was blinded by a divine One. And in his blindness he saw the light of salvation. Repentance changed his life and he became a courageous crusader for Christ. God's armor protected him through shipwreck and assaults. It even protected him when he died.

God's armor comes in all sizes. It blazes with righteousness, polished by Christ's death and resurrection. Wearing Christ's armor offers more than protection. It arms Christians with good deeds. Christians perform heroic services because God loves them. It's all the love they need. In return, they demonstrate love for Jesus by selflessly serving others.

Prayer: Polish our armor each time we come to You in repentance, dear Savior. Make us shine with good deeds to glorify You and to spread Your famous love to others. Amen.

December 15

LEADING LIGHT

"By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light so that they could travel by day or night" (Ex. 13:21).

From the beginning of time, God provided convenient ways to follow Him. He searched for Adam and Eve in the garden to share His presence with them. He appeared as a column of fire to guide His children to the Promised Land. He led the Wise Men to Jesus with an unusual star. He gives us His Words and shares fellowship with us whenever we gather with other Christians.

Following the leader was more than a child's game for the Israelites. Because it was deadly to gaze upon God in His glory, He revealed His presence by appearing as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God was always within sight. His protection continually was evident. The Israelites followed Him and found shelter and security.

The pillar of fire still leads us today. He leads us through murky nights and shelters us from the devil's lurid power. Our pillar of fire is none other than Jesus Himself. We, too, may use various symbols to remind us of His presence. During these pre-Christmas days, one noticeable symbol is the Christmas tree. Is yours ablaze with lights? Perhaps you can think of it as your pillar of fire. Christmas trees lighten our hearts. They can remind us of Christ's birth. They can symbolize God's gift to us.

Christmas trees point upward—the same direction Jesus' friends gazed when they heard the Advent promise: Jesus shall return. How excited they were! They expected Him to return quickly. They busily prepared others to receive Him; 2,000 years later we're still expecting Him. And He will come—perhaps before you're done reading this. Or perhaps He will come in 5,000 or 10,000 years. Get ready now with the same excitement and urgency Jesus' friends felt when they first heard His Advent promise.

Prayer: Lead us, Lord Jesus, into God's presence. As we wait for You to come, be our pillar of fire and pillar of faith. For Jesus' sake, we pray. Amen.

December 16

HOW TO REACH STARDOM

***“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever”
(Dan. 12:3).***

Daniel learned first hand about Judgment Day. In the words immediately preceding today's Bible passage, Daniel heard a wonderful promise and a terrible threat. “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.”

The Holy Spirit makes Christians wise. They know the fantastic story of their salvation, and by God's power they believe it. Like Daniel, Christians know God's strength and power can defeat even more than raging lions. It destroys death.

But did you notice God's Word about those who “lead many to righteousness?” Eternal stardom is a dream beyond reach of even the most talented performer. But it's within grasp of those who share their faith with others. Stars are always in the sky even when you can't see them. Their light twinkles down through space and sprinkles earth with natural beauty. God's witnesses do the same thing.

God made the stars to shine. He makes Christians shine with Christ. Christian witness and testimony provide ever present light to proclaim Christ's victory over death and His promise to awake all who “sleep in the dust.” As the starlit sky provides breathtaking splendor amid the dark universe, so Christ's love provides astonishing beauty that brightens everyday lives within an imperfect world.

This Advent, share your Christian wisdom with others. Be a star in God's galaxy of saints. Be confident that you together with all other believers are wise and “will shine with the brightness of the heavens.”

Prayer: We want to be stars, dear heavenly Father. Make us shine brightly for others as we await our place in heaven. Give us energy and confidence that we may brighten the lives of others with Your Light. Amen.

THE DAY THE SUN STOOD STILL

So the sun stood still and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies. There has never been a day like it before or since, a day when the Lord listened to a man. Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!" (Joshua 10: 13-14)

Joshua uttered a startling request. It came after he trustingly led Israel in some unconventional battles. The Lord was Israel's only effective ammunition, and He provided an arsenal of extraordinary weapons. Shortly before this request, God had beaten back Israel's enemies with a volley of hailstones that claimed more enemy lives than Israel's more ordinary weapons. On the day that the Lord listened to Joshua's plea, the sun and moon halted in the heavens and gave Israel another mysterious victory.

The Lord listens to our requests all the time. As He did in Joshua's time, God gives us only what is good according to His will. Several requests may be among many that are good to bring before God.

1. Keep the devil from claiming us. This may take more divine power than it took for the Creator to temporarily restrict the movement of the sun He placed in the sky! God and the devil battle over us daily. The devil seems to win some daily skirmishes. But God wins the war because His ultimate weapon is the death defying Messiah.

2. Keep us faithful. Since God gave us faith, it's only natural that He wants to maintain it. We can boldly ask this of God because Jesus made it possible for us to worthily approach the Father for spiritual blessings. We don't even have to add "if it is Your will." It is indeed God's will that we remain faithful.

3. Thy Kingdom come. The common table prayer which begins, "Come Lord Jesus," actually appears at the end of the Bible. It's a response to Christ's promise in Rev. 22:20, "I am coming soon."

Advent is a special time to prepare for His coming. Time does not exist for God as it does for us. That Christ is coming soon simply means that He may be here at any time. Then He will gather us together with all believers to live in His new paradise with perpetual Christmas spirit.

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus. Come soon. Amen.

December 20

HIDDEN LIGHTS

"No one lights a lamp and hides it in a jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, he puts it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light" (Luke 8:16).

How ridiculous it would be to decorate a Christmas tree and then cover it so no one could tell that the holy holiday was being celebrated. Bright with Christ's love, Christians can put on their own personal display of joy.

Living Christian lifestyles can be just like decorations on a Christmas tree. Christians can be ornaments of faith. A simple way to display faith in Christ is by identifying with Christian religious symbols. Displaying crosses or fish symbols, either on lapels, desks, or walls tells people where you place your trust.

Christian lives can also be like Christmas lights. (Hopefully they're not stored in the attic most of the year!) Variety characterizes Christians as they beam God's love to others. Some Christians are like bubble lights. Souls warmed by Jesus' love generate bubbly personalities that always seem happy—alive with Christ.

Other Christians may be more like standard tree lights. They glow constantly with their own unique colors. Christians are given individual gifts to use as they let their lights shine. Some are good speakers while others are better listeners. Some can lead Bible classes or teach Sunday school. Others may have voices fit for melodically praising God in choirs. All Christians are colored with their own gifts from God.

Like Christmas lights, Christians are more effective when they are strung together. The pinpoint of light given by one Christian is amplified many times when Christians gather together. Let your light shine this holiday season as you gather with Christian friends for fellowship and worship.

Prayer: Lord, let our lights shine! Let them shine in public so that others may come to know Your love for them. Amen.

December 21

EVERLASTING LIGHT

"The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the

moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory" (Is. 60:19).

Consumers pay high prices for long lasting light bulbs. Energy saving devices can be placed in conventional light fixtures. They reduce costs but they also dim the light bulb. Allowing lights to remain lit 24 hours a day for even a year would produce astronomical electrical bills, but Isaiah's long life light source is absolutely free. When Isaiah spoke of an everlasting light, he was forecasting a future when light bulbs and power companies would be outdated by a better source of energy.

Among Isaiah's many prophecies were those that envisioned God's heavenly kingdom. Heaven will boast of endless days without need for God's original sources of earthly light. Nightmares will become extinct because there will be no night. Fear of darkness will disappear and danger will be unable to lurk in the shadows. God's pure light will bring peace and protection.

God's glory glowed so brightly that no human could look directly at Him. Moses caught a glimpse of God, but only in passing. A direct confrontation would have killed Moses. Such light leaves no shadows or dimly lit corners. This pure light will expose God's glory and believers throughout history will bask in its life giving radiance.

When can we expect to live in everlasting light? No one knows. That's why Jesus urged His beloved followers to be ready. Just as we might make hectic efforts to ready our homes for Christmas guests, we need to keep our spiritual houses in order for Christ's return. God's Word through Bible study, devotional activities, and worship services prepares us well. The Holy Spirit brings His Word alive in us and preserves our faith. And Jesus provides it completely free.

Prayer: We praise You, dear God, for preparing us for Your Son's second coming. Help us remain vigilant and eager to welcome Him. Amen.

December 22

FLOOD LIGHTS

"Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth" (Gen. 9:16).

God mixed some sunlight and water droplets to uniquely illustrate His promise to Noah and all creation. He pledged that never again would He destroy the earth with a flood, and He draped a rainbow across the sky as a sign of His promise. Today, rainbows often symbolize happiness and hope, too. Some myths even claim that rainbows end in a pot of gold. Christians remember God's promise to Noah when they see rainbow-streaked skies, but they also can peer beyond the rainbow. They'll find no pot of gold. Their treasure is greater. Martin Luther explained Christ's gift this way: "I believe that Jesus Christ . . . redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death."

Why would Christ make such a sacrifice? He chose us to live with Him according to His original plan. He selected us to be His people. He knew our names long before our parents picked them. Such love was demonstrated many times to God's people. Noah was just one example. And when Christ comes again and the earth as we know it is destroyed, we, too, will float on His love to the new life prepared for us. The next rainbow will bathe us in a sparkling spectrum of God's light.

Like Noah we have the comfort and hope of God's promise. At the end of a Christian's rainbow is eternal joy. It's God's promise come true.

Prayer: O God of Noah and faithful people everywhere, preserve our faith that we may ever serve You both on earth and in heaven. Amen.

December 23

THE LAMPLIGHTER

"You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light" (Ps. 18:28).

It's an age of accomplishments. Prizes and awards abound for creative, ambitious people. Scientists, inventors, actors and actresses, musicians, engineers, architects, physicians—most every profession honors the best of their bunch. Championship teams boast, "We're number one." Among a few humble award recipients, you'll hear a majority say, "WE did it." It's no wonder that some people believe they can save themselves, too. What a waste of God's most precious gift!

There are three groups of gift wasters. **First, there are those who think they can earn gifts.** True gifts are those given without merit or worthiness. They express love that can't be bought or bartered. Trying to earn a gift is an insult to the giver.

Second, there are always those who think they deserve gifts. And they rarely receive presents worthy enough of their assumed goodness. Arrogance and pride actually may prevent others from giving them gifts.

Third is a group to which only fools belong. They are those too lazy, preoccupied, or thankless to pull the ribbons, tear the paper, and open the box. It is better that gifts to such people are deposited directly into the trash.

Christ gives us the gift of life. Our present is His presence. It's a gift that defies earning. It's a gift we don't deserve. Accepting the gift is a passive act, too. It's ours because Jesus placed it in our hearts.

Our Lamplighter ignites the gift of Christ's light. He keeps us burning with His Spirit and chases the devil's darkness with sparks of His love. As you open gifts this Christmas, remember God's gift of a Savior and His promise of eternal life.

Prayer: Dear Savior and Supplier of eternal gifts, keep our lamps burning brightly that we might never lose sight of You. Keep us humble, knowing that our salvation is freely given through Your love. Amen.

December 24

NEWS FLASH

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord' (Luke 2:8-11).

Merry Christmas! Luke reports the story that has provided nearly 2,000 years of mirth and delight. The shepherds' first Christmas was very different than modern Christmases. Can you imagine Christmas without counting the remaining shopping days? Imagine no frantic search for the Christmas cards purchased half price last December 26; no schedule shuffling to bring families together; And no gargantuan grocery lists. Yet, the shepherds' Christmas was the grandest ever!

The shepherds had no time to prepare for Christmas. One minute the fields were dark and quiet, and then in the next minute their familiar world exploded with an angelic news flash. They weren't expecting Christ that night, but they knew they needed Him. They weren't humming Christmas carols. Instead, they were serenaded by a holy choir. And they didn't settle back to reminisce about fine presents and good feelings. They rushed to Bethlehem to search for their Savior.

Christ is coming again. His next arrival will come as unexpectedly as His first. Chances are, He won't conduct a news conference for the media or send formal announcements to each church in the world. He gave us His Word and His promise in the Bible. When He comes He'll find people doing what they ordinarily do. Like the shepherds in those lonely, dark fields, we're likely to be terrified at first, but the Lord Jesus will comfort us. His glory will light the sky, and we'll go to see Him face to face. Then we'll experience the truest of Christmas spirits—the one the shepherds felt 2,000 years ago.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for giving us another Christmas to celebrate. We praise You for coming to earth to save us. Come again and take us to live with You forever. Amen.

December 25

MERRY CHRISTMAS

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:19-21).

It was amid darkness that the Christian world first began celebrating Christmas. Some 200-300 years passed before Christ's birth attained festival status. Early Christians didn't spend as much time thinking and meditating upon Christ's birth as they did in remembering His life, work, and resurrection. The young church concentrated on Christ's next coming which many expected momentarily.

As years and decades slipped away, Christians began to recognize the significance of Christ's birth. In the fourth century, they witnessed pagan Roman celebrations that occurred each year during the winter solstice.

Romans bid each other a hearty “Io Saturnalia.” They celebrated with decorations of holly, mistletoe, and evergreen trees. They exchanged gifts and held feasts of Roman proportions. For them, December 25, was the feast of Sol Invictus—The Unconquerable Sun. It was a feast of dismal, satanic darkness celebrating the increasing minutes of daylight after the shortest day of the year.

Christians also found festivals and celebrations appealing. They retaliated against the pagans and uncovered a monumental backdrop for conducting one’s life in a new way—Christ’s way. We Christians have adopted many of the Roman traditions, but they spring from a lasting source of joy. Nearly 2,000 years later, Sol Invictus is insignificant—but Christians still wish each other Merry Christmas. Christ is the Unconquerable Son—the Son of God.

Prayer: So much has changed since You first came to earth, dear Jesus. We thank You that Your love remains unchanged. This Christmas Day we pray that You bring others to know Your love, too. Amen.

December 26

DEAD BATTERIES

*“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ”
(Matt. 25:7-8—read Matt. 25:1-13 for the complete story).*

’Twas the day after Christmas and all through the house
Electric toys lingered, still as a dead mouse.
The batteries were drained, all empty and dead;
Now nothing more useful than acid and lead.

Though not a famous poem, this verse relates the sad saga that many parents experience no later than the day after Christmas. It is a wise parent who stores a cache of batteries to power electric toys that brightened Christmas for their youngsters.

Jesus told a different story. It concerned 10 young ladies who were invited to a wedding. The bridegroom was delayed and the hour became late. The young ladies drowsed into the night until they were awakened by the cry, “Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!” Five of the girls had been wise and brought enough fuel for their lamps, but the other five had neglected to trouble themselves. Off they went in search of oil. In the

meantime, the groom arrived and the banquet began behind the safety of locked doors. When the foolish young ladies finally returned to the banquet, entrance was denied. No one ever unlocked doors in the middle of the night. The danger was too great.

Jesus ended the story by saying, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."

Our Savior was referring to His next coming. Like the virgins in the story, we need to guard our burning lamps of faith through the darkness of sinful lives. The Holy Spirit charges our batteries with faith, but we need recharging with His Word to guard against temptation, to protect us from eternal death. Then when He comes again, our faith will be burning brightly, He will recognize us, and we'll join Him for an eternal banquet in heaven.

Prayer: O Holy Spirit, keep us charged with faith that we may be ready for Jesus when He comes. Help us avoid all things that attempt to weaken or kill our faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

December 27

LIFE LIGHT

"In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it"
(John 1:4-5).

John capitalized on the saving knowledge that Christ was the Light of the world. He understood that life required light.

Most every life form requires light to grow strong and healthy. Elementary science students often duplicate experiments that demonstrate the effects of light and lack of it on a host of plants. Plants given sufficient light have strong leaves and bear seeds or fruit. Those deprived of light wilt with weakness and fail miserably.

Living under the Light bestows both earthly and eternal life on Christians. The book of Proverbs frequently confided that living by Godly guidelines resulted in lengthy life. This may be puzzling to those who know Godly people who died at an early age. What Proverbs refers to as long life might be thought of as blessed life. A life blessed by God is filled with contentment and acceptance of His will. Life with the Light is strong in faith and trust. It bears fruits of good works and Gospel deeds.

The Life Light also provides endless life. Sin wins a temporary battle when lungs and heart cease functioning. Our fight for life depends upon CPR—Christ Provides Resurrection. The Savior has already proved His power. Even before He conquered sin on the cross, He used divine power to raise some who had died. And when He gasped His last breath on Good Friday, tombs in the local cemetery cracked open and some faithful followers arose to tell others the mysterious news.

This is no time for experiments. Too many people prefer to remain spiritual mushrooms, growing in dank darkness, never seeing the Light that could keep them fresh with life. The Life Light will shine brightly on Judgment Day. We'll gather around Him and sing praises to the One whose light provides eternal life. As we await His coming, we need to show and tell others about the Light of the world.

Prayer: Merciful Father, thank You for sending the Life Light to us. We want Him to return so that we can live with You forever. Keep us in the Light and bring others to it. Amen.

December 28

FLASHLIGHTS

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, ‘I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life’ ”(John 8:12).

Do you know anyone who keeps a flashlight handy in case of sudden power failures? They don't want to be caught unprepared when the lights go out. Perhaps they fear falling down stairs or stumbling into dangerous obstacles. Such fear is wise when it motivates advanced planning.

What flashlights does God provide for spiritual safety? First, He gave us the Bible. It's a flashlight that shines with authority. The Bible deals with every aspect of life and lights the way past dark satanic obstacles that would block our way to God. His Word lights up His laws so that we know right from wrong, good from bad, His will from the devil's deceit. It shines with the Gospel light that illuminates a bustling manger, a naked cross, and an empty tomb—visual signs that show us safety and comfort through His love.

A second flashlight provided by God is Baptism. It's usually the first flashlight a fledgling Christian ever owns. God rescues His people from the

dark denizens of the devil and places them in Christ's light through Baptism. When Jesus was baptized, a dove descended from heaven and God proclaimed that this was His beloved Son. Baptized Christians share the same fame in God's eyes. God loves them because they become brothers of Christ through His death and resurrection.

A third flashlight is Holy Communion through which Christ supplies forgiveness and fellowship. We become clean and refurbished with His forgiveness. Everyone knows that many flashlights together provide better lighting than one single beam. Communion brings Christians together in such fellowship to share Christ's gift of light and love.

Flashlights need use if they are to remain fresh and ready to snap to life. By the Holy Spirit, Baptism, Holy Communion, and the Bible keep us fresh and faithful.

Prayer: Dear Light of the world, keep our hearts fresh with the gifts You gave us along with our faith. Be our flashlight when we fail to live according to Your plan. Focus the Light on Yourself that we may always know where to go when sin darkens our lives. Amen.

December 29

BASKING IN THE SON

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Sunlight can do many things to us. It badly burns or endows healthy glows. It furnishes comfortable warmth or produces showers of sweat. It replenishes energy or depletes and dehydrates. Misuse of sun power is often the result of unwise decisions.

God's Son does many things for us. When sin's guilt condemns us, He revives us with His love. Jesus warms us with His mercy when we are terrified by our sins. He fills us with hope and shows the hopelessness of looking elsewhere for mercy, forgiveness, and life. That brings us to today's Bible reading which describes Christians' many ways.

First, we are chosen. Doesn't it feel good to belong? Not that we joined the

Christian Club by ourselves—we were picked by God. We belong to Him. Jesus paid the dues.

Second, we are kings or queens. When Jesus made us brothers or sisters with Him we were adopted into God's royal family. Over what do we reign? God-given power enables us to defeat our mortal enemies—death and the devil. God protects us with armies of angels. His Son fights by our side. The devil wages constant war, and death may temporarily imprison us, but final victory is ours.

Third, we are holy. Holy? Certainly we sin. But Jesus makes us saints even while we are sinners. Christ forgives and shields our sins from the Father. We look like saints to Him for Jesus' sake.

Peter knew what basking in the Son meant for Christians. Being chosen, royal, and holy requires action. Belonging to God demands more than relaxing on sandy, tranquil beaches. Those who wear the distinguishing glow of life in the Son declare God's glory by what they do and say. They shine with good works and humbly demonstrate their Godliness. They fight temptation with the Spirit's power. And they share their royal wealth with others, living like the joy filled saints that they are.

Prayer: Make our lives a declaration of praise to You dear Jesus. Amen.

December 30

HEALING LIGHT

"But for you who revere My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall" (Mal. 4:2).

Lasers are new and potent tools of medicine. They produce pure beams of light that have capacity to both destroy malignancy and heal quickly.

Malachi calls Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, a healer. We might compare Him to a laser.

A few days ago the strains of "Silent Night" filled churches everywhere. People sang of God's Son, love's pure light. Christ is like a laser that carefully cuts away cancerous sinfulness. Without spiritual surgery, sin

surely would separate its victims from life with God. Festered and infected souls would be doomed had Christmas never come. And recovery never would be complete without the Easter event.

Love's pure light selectively destroys sin without damaging the sinner. Jesus took the sins of the world—murder, lust, adultery, jealousy, rebelliousness, disrespect, ecological misuse, greed, hate, and even weakness of faith—and vaporized them to save us from burning in hell's feverish fires.

God's Son heals us. By eliminating sin's deadly potential, He frees us to enjoy our spiritual health. What a joyful picture Malachi paints when he says we'll frolic like calves released from their stalls. Unabashed freedom; youthful enthusiasm; explosive energy; Christ's healing provides it all. And the best thing about His healing is that it's free—no sobering medical bills to dampen our joy. Jesus was the insurance policy that paid the price in full.

Kick up your heels. Enjoy life because you don't need to fear death. Love's pure light will brighten our lives as our eyelids close on a sinful world.

Prayer: Dear great Physician, we praise You for healing our sin sickened souls. Remove all traces of sin and help us live confidently in the knowledge that You have extended our lives into eternity. Amen.

December 31

SPEEDY LIGHT

"Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him" (Luke 12:35, 36).

New Year's Eve—it's a night when many reflect on annual memories and prepare for new beginnings. Perhaps New Year's Eve should be celebrated during Advent. This evening finds us thankful for our past and looking ahead to an unknown future.

Some fear the future. Anxiety leads to dread and robs hope from another year under God's mercy. While some fear the future, others fear that there won't be a future. How futile! God tells us not to worry because it adds nothing to life except misery. He commands the future in ways that defy death. Explorer Ponce de Leon is said to have searched the "new world" for

immortality, but God had already provided it through Jesus Christ. The real New World is heaven.

Wise Christians prepare for the future. We have no idea when the future as earth knows it will end abruptly. It will happen more quickly than even the speed of light. In today's Bible reading we're told to be dressed and ready, perhaps as many people are dressed and ready tonight for a new year.

Time may seem to drag as party revelers await midnight. But the final 60 seconds seem to race toward a finish line only to leap forward again into a new year. Our advent on earth finds us waiting for Christ to establish a new time and an endless year. We are racing toward an end that in reality is a beginning. No celebration tonight will equal the celebration at the end of time. Our triumphant Savior will shatter the night sky with sizzling glory, and we might even dance to the angelic trumpets. We will toast Him with our praise and our love will extend to all the faithful.

Have a wonderful evening. And when the clock chimes at midnight, remember the new time that awaits you when Christ comes again.

Prayer: Thank You dear Father for the blessings of the past year and especially for keeping us faithful to You. Grant us a new year that finds happiness in Your loving care. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

January 1

NEW LIGHT

"I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there" (Rev. 21:22-25).

Happy New Year! Is it still as happy as it was less than 24 hours ago? Or did the joy end as doors closed behind those who departed for home after a night out for celebrating? Dawn's first rays of sunshine probably revealed a sleepy, partied-out world this morning.

In Revelation, John tells us about a place that night never closes. God gave John a glimpse of a new world in a new era. The early light revealed a

city without churches. Their disappearance wasn't alarming, though. God replaced them with Himself. Christ was the new temple for the new age. Places of worship were replaced by the Object of worship. Christians no longer needed to stare at sculpted guesses about His appearance. They saw Him and reveled in His presence.

When John scanned the sky he saw no sun or moon. The lights God installed in the air during creation were replaced by glory. God's glory would have killed John were it not for Jesus who shielded him from God's just wrath. Like John, we deserve to melt away because of our sins, but Jesus restored human capability to live in God's bright presence.

Have you ever wondered what heaven is like? John's often symbolic descriptions recorded in Revelation give us an idea, a bright idea. Living in God's glory will chase night away. Never again will it close its doors on a festive celebration of a new era.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for revealing some of heaven's mysteries to us. Never let us become so curious or selfish that we lose sight of You in all the glory that You're so willing to share with us. Amen.

January 2

LIGHT FOR ALL

"I will also make You a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring My salvation to the ends of the earth" (Is. 49:6).

Have you ever noticed how daylight seeps through the tiniest cracks? Shades, curtains, and blinds can't completely block out the sun. Light searches for opportunities to be seen. It allows nothing to block its mission.

After sin clouded the world through Adam and Eve, God enlightened the earth by promising the Savior whose birth we celebrated just days ago. Adam and Eve weren't the only ones who trusted God's promise. A parade of sinners known as the Children of Israel marched through ages of the Lord's mercy. Many fell away from God, victims of the devil and their own evil desires. But the faithful few who lived according to God's plan always considered themselves among God's chosen people. In fact, God told them that they were His choice. Israelites, faithful to God and otherwise, felt that they were sole proprietor of God's mercy until Jesus arrived on the scene.

Christ said He was for everybody. He indicated that God's chosen included Gentiles, non Jews, as well as faithful Israelites. By saying this He fulfilled prophecies like the one in today's Bible reading.

Christ, the true light, is as persistent and pervasive as daylight. He wants everyone to be saved. Even those who pull the shades can't evade Him. Jesus gives opportunity to all. Yet some choose to keep the curtains closed. They refuse Him entry into their lives.

Thank God that our shades are up. The Holy Spirit has worked in us that we may live in His light. His Word lightens burdens, offers security, and delivers His warmth and affection. Praise God indeed that He chose us.

Prayer: Father, we praise You for making Your light shine for everybody. Lift the shades of darkness for all and melt cold hearts with Your Son. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

January 3

LIGHT POWER

***"May they who love You be like the sun when it rises in its strength"
(Judges 5:31).***

Scientists call light radiant energy. Light has power. It travels 186,000 miles each second. Light generated less than eight minutes ago on the far distant sun is now reaching earth. Colors cannot exist without light. Fires begin when light is intensely focused on a combustible material.

Light is mysterious. Although we can't see without light, we also cannot detect its rays as it travels through outer space. Its real value is revealed when it is reflected off objects and our brains interpret the images reflected through our eyes. Over the years, physicists have developed conflicting theories about the nature of light.

Cultures around the world and throughout history have recognized the power and mystery of the sun. They've feared it, worshiped it, harnessed its energy.

The blessing from Judges 5:31 extends the power of the sun to those who love God. Christians have sun power or rather S-O-N power. Son power is resurrection energy. The Son of God beat down sin like a desert sun at noon withers everything in its rays. The Son of God speeds His mercy to sinners in

despair. Faster than the speed of light, forgiveness is granted for Jesus's sake. The Son's energy softens hard hearts and fuels good deeds done to God's glory. There are many theories about the Son of God, but only one chief doctrine on which salvation depends: Jesus died to save sinners and freely gives them saving faith.

Prayer: Thank You for giving us Son power, dear Lord. Energize us to share that power to Your glory with everyone we meet. In Jesus' powerful name we pray. Amen.

January 4

FLICKERING LIGHTS

“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14).

The light that flickers soon goes out. Paul warned the Corinthians that associating with unbelievers could easily dim and weaken those who knew Christ's light. Darkness and light in fellowship only produce dusk—a time when it's very difficult to see clearly.

Paul did not mean that evangelism and outreach should be avoided. His concerns were for those who stubbornly or conveniently maintained relationships with those who boldly rejected Christ. He feared that false teachers would erode God's Law and contaminate His Gospel.

You don't need to search hard for condemning evidence. Society considers certain sins trivial. With time's passage those sins appear to be no sins at all. Adultery is a good example. Sexual relationships between couples not married to each other is commonplace. It's not unusual to find this practice even among Christians. God's Word is clear on this matter, yet some people say the Bible is “behind the times” on this issue and other such issues as abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality.

There's no question that our gracious God mercifully forgives such sins. But hard-hearted unbelievers may unfavorably influence their Christian associates. If others convinced us that sin doesn't exist, why would we need a Savior? Sinful pleasures quickly become false gods. And the real danger in Christians rejecting unpopular portions of God's Word lies in the fact that eventually they may deny the saving Gospel, too.

Christian lights flicker with the normal waves of sin-blown lives. We must be armed with God's power to avoid those who would like to extinguish our flames. The Holy Spirit brings us the Unquenchable Flame, Jesus Christ, to keep our souls aflame with God's love.

Prayer: Gracious Father, protect us from contamination by those who would mislead us. Help us accept Your holy Word as the authority on all issues for all times. Grant us forgiveness when we flicker. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

January 5

LIGHT HEARTED

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light" (Eph. 5:8).

We all enjoy those light hearted moments. Some people seem perpetually happy while people at the other end of the spectrum may experience only a singular light-hearted moment, perhaps annually.

Christian joy is supernatural. Christ's message of salvation provides good motivation for light-heartedness, for with it comes realization that nothing can overcome God's gift. Not even death. Christians can smile contentedly or even laugh heartily through any situation when they possess the Gospel truth. They can laugh at themselves and enjoy the earthly life God provided.

Laughter provides many blessings. Scientists say that laughter has positive effects on every vital organ in the body. It reduces tension and relaxes tissues. It even exercises organs. One step down the rung of mirth is the smile—formed by only 14 muscles, far less than the number required to frown. And how about the message happy smiles and positive attitudes produce? A seminary professor once told his students that they should smile when they preach of heaven or the Gospel. But his advice for preaching about hell? He said, "Your ordinary face will do."

Smiles, laughter, and light heartedness would be in short supply were it not for Jesus. Because of Him, God smiles at us. We could never withstand God's frown, much less His outright anger. He smiles at us because Jesus made us righteous. God doesn't see our sinfulness because it's blocked from His view by a cross and a tomb. God smiles because His Son destroyed death and defeated the devil. God smiles. Smile back.

Prayer: Lord, drive away our glum moments and remind us that You are smiling for Jesus' sake. Lighten our hearts from their burdens that we may enjoy our salvation both now and in the future. Amen.

January 6

FOLLOW THE STAR

"After they had heard the king (Herod), they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the Child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed" (Matt.2:9, 10).

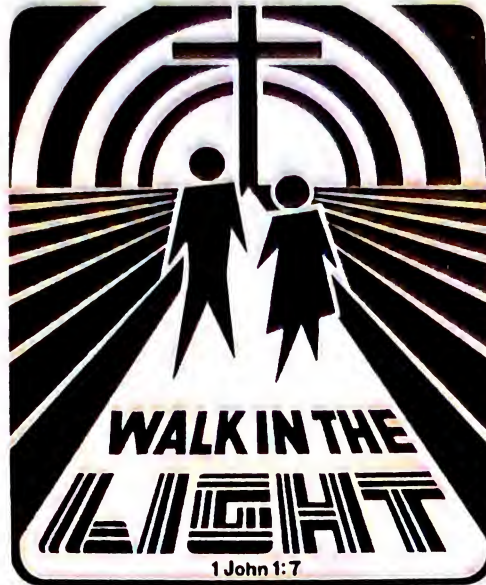
Happy Epiphany! Earlier Christians sometimes called this day the Feast of Lights or Feast of Manifestation. Some commemorate this day as the baptism of Jesus while many others connect it with the wise men's visit to Jesus.

Why was the wise men's journey to Jesus important? One reason indicates just how we find Jesus. Actually, we don't find Him at all. God brings us to the Savior just as the star led the sages to Jesus. God's merciful and loving guidance through the Holy Spirit brings us to faith. This is not of our own doing! It is God's gift.

Secondly, the magi, or wise men, were not Jewish. They were Gentiles. Old Testament Jews, especially those who were experts in the Law, expected an exclusive Savior. But Jesus lived, died, and rose devoid of discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race, or national origin. The only requirement was existence as a poor, miserable sinner. Unlike many of Christ's own people, including King Herod, the wise men were overjoyed to find a Savior. They knew they were lost without Him. Herod and company were looking for someone else.

Finally, the visitors were called wise men. They probably were wise about many earthly matters. We think they were scholars as well as royalty. But they possessed a greater wisdom which was made manifest when they kneeled before Jesus. They became wise with salvation. No greater wisdom exists. And we have it all!

Prayer: May God always grant us to dine on the wisdom from the Feast of Lights. May He strengthen our faith and keep His star leading us on the path to eternity. Amen.



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The Int'l LLL strives to bring Christ to the nations—to share His light of salvation and forgiveness with everyone, the world over.

Is it worth the effort?

Souls are dying each day—many have not heard of Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, or have turned their heads and hearts away from Him. When Christ ascended, He commissioned a few faithful followers—11 apostles—to begin the work of proclaiming salvation by grace through faith in Him. Only 11 men started sharing the Good News—and God blessed it. He has continued to bless it by His Spirit, bringing the life-changing News into millions of lives.

One successful way to do this today is by means of media. The Int'l LLL is privileged to have been blessed by God in its radio, television, and print proclamation. The Advent booklet you are reading right now comes to you freely as a sign of God's grace—His free gift of salvation in Christ.

The work continues. Is it worth it? Yes—as long as God gives the direction and strength.

Should you feel that the Lord is moving you to support this work, you may wish to send a contribution—even \$1 or \$2 or \$5 is a big help—so that the work can grow even more under God's blessing. Write to:



**Int'l LLL, Sta. 230 ADV
2185 Hampton Ave.
St. Louis, Mo. 63139**

**or LLL-Canada, Sta. ADV
Box 481, 270 Lawrence Ave.
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